280 MC Box 51

THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION.

A SERMON

PREACHED

IN THE

American Presbyterian Church,

NOVEMBER 24TH, 1867,

By Rev. J. B. BONAR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MONTREAL:
F. E. GRAFTON, PUBLISHER AND BOOKSELLER.

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The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
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Queen's University at Kingston

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SERMON.

"Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."—2 *Tim.* ii, xix.

Roman Catholic missionaries have often been accused of lowering the standard of Christ's requirements in order to multiply the number of their converts. It is said, that Francois Xavier, who, in the course of a few years, baptized hundreds of thousands in India, China and Japan, allowed the converts to worship their old idols under new names, and required of them no change in their principles of action or modes of life. In other instances, men have been baptized and admitted to all the privileges of the Christian Church, while continuing to uphold poligamy and slavery, and to live like the heathen around them. The requirements of missionaries have differed in different ages, countries, and circumstances. Even in nominally Christian countries, different Protestant communions attach very different ideas to the meaning of a profession of Christianity. In the state churches of Germany and Great Britain, every adult person, who has been unconvicted of an offence punishable by the laws of the country, has a legal right to the ordinances of the Christian church. In some churches, every person who chooses, receives, without question, the emblems of the Lord's broken body and shed blood; in others, a life of at least respectable morality is required; and in others still, a certain degree of knowledge seems to be the main requisite. There is a still wider difference, in the opinions and actions of individuals in reference to this important matter. In even the purest churches, there are those who seem to regard a profession of religion as only a decent and becoming form, involving few responsibilities, and implying no great change of life, or other radical distinction between those who make and those who neglect it. There are some who regard it as such a saving ordinance that it compensates for the neglect of every other

duty; while others regard it as involving so much that they never dare to unite in it.

The duty of making a profession of religion and commemorating the great fact of Christianity in the ordinance of the Supper, is one that is universal, and universally admitted. No one who acknowledges the Bible as the Word of God, or recognises Christ's right to legislate, can deny this obligation. It is one of the most obvious of all our duties. But this obligation to profess religion implies a previous obligation to embrace it and to become a sincere Christian. It supposes certain qualifications as requisite on the part of those who make it. It also implies that they are under obligations to live on different principles and for other objects, than those which govern men who reject and deny the Saviour. There are involved, in the very act of professing religion, certain great principles, which are the same in all ages and circumstances and which man has neither the right nor the power to change.

There are two considerations which show the prime importance of correct views on this subject. One is, that a profession of religion is one of the most solemn and important facts in a man's life and history. Its vows are sacred and eternal; its results are such as deeply to affect his whole destiny. It, moreover, puts him before the world as a witness for Jesus, and as an exponent of the power and value of the Christian religion.

The other consideration is, that his whole Christian character and usefulness will be deeply colored and largely influenced by his views of the nature of this profession. It is an undoubted and a lamentable fact, that many professing Christians add nothing to the church's strength. Some have very limited means of usefulness. Some, from the want of talent or education, are scarcely fitted to do good, except in the narrowest circles. But apart from those labouring under such disqualifications, the number of those who are the unflinching advocates of truth and adherents to principle;

who sustain the ordinances of religion and institutions of benevolence; who can be depended on when a tide of worldliness and vanity sets in upon the church; who labor with a zeal that never tires, an ardor that never cools, and a charity that is never offended; the number of such is comparatively small. Albert Barnes, a calm and judicious man, estimates them as about *one fifth* of those who profess love to Jesus. Part are zealous for a season, but their zeal disappears "like a morning cloud or the early dew." Part are characteristically indolent and self indulgent. Part become immersed in fashion and the strife for social position, when their influence as Christians expires, as a matter of course. Part become rich and are introduced into new circles, where their heads are turned and their attachment to Jesus is chilled. Part form new connections in life, when their ardor languishes, and it is shown, that their zeal at any time was the result of circumstances rather than of principle. Part become the victims of some prejudice, which smothers all their Christian zeal and eats out, as with a poisonous tooth, all their Christian affections. Part take their complexion, like the chamelion, from the objects and associations around them; they are benevolent or lukewarm, zealous or conformed to the world, in proportion as their *set* are benevolent, lukewarm, or worldly. Now, of the whole number, a few are doubtless entire strangers to religion; but the main reason, in my judgment, for this lamentable state of things lies in the low views, which largely prevail, of the principles involved in the organization of the church and implied in the profession of Christianity. This is the worm at the root of Christian piety, the loveliest plant which grows on earthly soil! And hence, no more important question can be suggested for the consideration of the church, or of the individual professor, than this, and upon no one does it behove the Christian preacher to speak with greater caution or more fidelity; what does a profession of religion involve, or what is it to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Let me, in dependence on divine grace, attempt to answer this question.

Observe in general:

"A Christian is the highest style of man." You may plaster the body with tinsel and teach it genteel manners; you may store the mind with knowledge and educate it to exquisite taste; you may make a man upright and moral, a true friend and a kind neighbour; but even this falls vastly short of the Christian standard. This is fashion's idol, without the soul of piety —the golden candlestick without the light—the frame, but not the picture. Do not misunderstand me; it is well to be upright and moral. Morality is vastly important. Without it, a man becomes like a tree with a hollow trunk, fair without, but with ants and reptiles and rotten wood within, ready to fall before the first tornado of temptation. Morality is important, yet moral principle is to Christian faith only what the dry channel of the aqueduct is to the living fountain, that can fill it and supply the wants of thirsty thousands.

Piety implies morality of the highest and purest kind. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is the second of its two greatest commandments. Without this, piety is like a body that has been bled to death, or a frame from which the bones have been taken. Christian piety implies morality, but it implies much more than this. It requires not only fair morals, but a renewed heart; not only just dealings with men, but truth and duty to the God of truth who reads the heart; not only integrity and justice and brotherly love, but faith and charity, humility and a holy conversation. "Do no man any wrong," is the behest of morality; "Do all men good," is the command of religion. "Keep off the stains of vice," says the one; "put on the robes, not only of virtue, but of holiness," says the other. Morality bids you, "pay your debts to your neighbour;" religion urges you to "give to all men liberally; accept as a bankrupt sinner, the free grace of God in Christ, and live as one who is bought with a price, no longer your own."

It must be confessed, it would be a great thing to

raise the mass of men to even this lower standard. They suffer themselves to be governed by their tastes and pleasures and prejudices, or by a soulless worldly policy, until a slave-driver's whip and chains could not impose a more hopeless or degrading bondage. They have no higher aim in life than mere self-gratification. They can hate and envy, deceive and offend, riot and carouse, all within the limits of a morality that keeps their names out of the newspapers and their persons from the police courts. They drift through life with no more moral pilotage than is needful to escape the rapids of vice or the snags of the civil law. All that constitutes the dignity of the human soul—reflection, conscientiousness, loftiness of aim, soberness of purpose, attachment to principle—all are thrust aside to make room for reckless vanity, frivolous amusement, mercenary profit or social ambition. The soul is disfigured like an Indian's body tatooed for the war-dance. To say something amusing, however foolish; to win some frivolous game; to master the legerdemain of fashion; to gain admission to some gay circle; to amass a certain amount of money;—this is the height of their aspirations—the apex of their loftiest ambitions.

Now, it is vastly important, and it would be a great achievement, to raise such persons to a decent moral standard. Man, a moral being, ought to be sober enough to see that there is something serious in life—that it means more than an empty pageant, a reeling dance, or a profitable business, ending with an expensive funeral. "This valley of existence, bounded by the mountain ranges of an eternity past and an eternity to come, with only the gates of death and the bar of judgment for its outlets, this is not the place for an immortal being to doze and carouse, to jest, to strut, or to hoard money. The great heavens stretch themselves above us to afford scope for nobler employments than these. The soul itself, the wonder of creation's wonders, within whose grasp centuries are gathered and millions of memories stored, which is capable of knowing and en-

joying the God that made it, and of filling more than an angel's sphere, this is too great and glorious a thing to be kicked about as the football of fashion, too capacious to be measured by the jester's standard," or satisfied with the accumulated savings of an Astor or a Rothschild. It is important therefore, that man should be moral.

A man cannot be a Christian and be immoral. I say, a man cannot be a Christian and be immoral. He may be overtaken by faults and surprised into immoral acts; but he cannot deliberately, knowingly, enter upon an immoral course, nor can he persevere in it, and be a Christian: the thing is an utter impossibility; the mere supposition is dishonoring to God the Spirit who dwells in every disciple of Jesus. Christianity makes men moral: but it is not content with this. It demands and implies very much more than this, viz:—a radical change in the heart or principles of action. Its aim is loftier and more comprehensive than anything merely moral. It demands, to attain its object, the enlistment of all the powers of the soul and their consecration to one definite and noble object.

But, to be more specific, a Christian profession implies, primarily, a humble acceptance of Christ's redemption as the only ground of hope. It is a great sacrifice of pride to proclaim to the world that we have nothing in ourselves to arrest the descending stroke of divine justice, and that, as helpless suppliants, our only appeal is to sovereign mercy. The Christian profession implies this. It bears on its face the implication of a confession of the man's need, and a conviction of the Redeemer's preciousness and power to save. It implies that the person making it is a converted man—a sinner born again, with evidences of the fact which satisfy, not only his pastor and session, or committee, but his own mind and conscience, that, through grace, he is a child of God. It is a practical confession of self-renunciation and distrust, and of unqualified confidence in Jesus Christ.

2. A profession of piety implies the determination

and effort to subordinate passion, lust, prejudice, self, to the divine will. When a man takes upon himself the name of Christ, he, by that act, declares his determination, to bring self into subjection to Jesus. As has well been said, "this is the only true mastery, for a man does not own himself until God owns him, and until that ownership is acknowledged. He is a slave to his baser nature. While a passion, against which reason revolts, domineers over him; while a prejudice, which reason cannot conquer nor conscience restrain, rules him, he is Satan's bond-slave. No matter what form his selfishness may assume, he is ruled by a tyrant as vile as his own deformity." Now, a profession of religion is simply a proclamation of war against this tyrant; and it is so understood by the world. Every professor of piety practically declares, not that he has gained the victory over self and Satan, but that he has turned his soul into a battlefield for God, and that he has resolved never to turn or flee until the victory is won. His presence at the communion-table proclaims him a sinner seeking deliverance—a soldier of Christ, animated by a loftier purpose than ever stirred the heart of Washington or Wallace, and engaged in a warfare more arduous and desperate than any waged by Wellington or Grant. It is easy to follow where inclination leads; but it is hard and painful to persevere day by day, and month after month in a course directly opposed to inclination. It is easy to speak well of men, to feel kindly towards them, to exercise confidence in them, and to work harmoniously with them, when *our* wishes are consulted, and *our* opinions followed; but it is a very different thing to do this when our opinions are lightly set aside, and our wishes wholly disregarded. In this there is a painful self-denial, as well as true nobility of soul. This is what is implied in the Christian life. A profession of religion is a deliberate and solemn declaration of our determination to enthrone God in the heart and to subdue self—to follow Jesus and conquer inclination. It is an open acknowledgment of God's supremacy, of our obligations, and of our determination to strive to meet

these obligations. It implies a life of earnest self-denial. The person who is not prepared to enter upon this course, and to persevere in it, is not prepared to make a profession of piety. And, the professor, who puts his own opinion above God's command, or consults his own inclination more than Christ's glory—he gives, in his life, the lie to his profession.

3. A Christian profession implies a separation from the world. The New Testament every where insists upon this. It is uniformly taught, that Christians should regard themselves a "peculiar people," and that a distinct and definite line should be drawn between them and others. Despite all that you may see in the Church of the present, it is a great principle laid down for our guidance, that we are *not* to be conformed to the world. Neither in spirit, in purpose, in aim, in desire, in manner or style of living, nor in forms of amusement, are Christ's followers to be conformed to this world. A profession of religion implies that we take upon ourselves *all* the laws of Jesus Christ, and this among others. Hence, the world expects the professor to be animated by a different spirit and governed by principles other than their own. This expectation is reasonable ; it is well founded.

The grand principle in the Bible is this :—on earth there are two great communities, which are quite distinct in their organization, design, spirit, laws and destiny. The one is the Christian Church, which embraces all of every name and nation, who submit to the laws and embrace the hopes of the Gospel ; the other is that great community which the Bible calls *the world*. Each has its own spirit, purposes and aims. When a man professes religion, he virtually breaks away from the world, renouncing its peculiar spirit, temper and laws ; he identifies himself with the Church, accepting its laws along with its privileges, and devoting himself to its peculiar aims and objects. The world may be mercenary and selfish, or vain and unprincipled ; it may be

gay and ostentatious; in social life it may consider only its own pleasure; in business it may be indifferent to all interests save its own; it may make promises which it never means to keep, and hold out hopes only to deceive; while pretending to be governed by principle, it may act habitually on policy; it may make money its God, fashion its law-giver, self-will its pilot, and pleasure its port. The world may do all this, but woe to him who brings any of these into the Church of the living God! When a man makes a profession of religion, he renounces all these to accept the laws of Christ. This profession implies that his sympathies and aims are with Jesus, and not with the world, whose God is self and whose law is policy. He will not, if he be a Christian, he *cannot* live and act as other men do. He has a spirit and temper above those which influence them, as well as motives, consolations and hopes of which they are ignorant. He walks among men, the citizen of a better country, with purer laws and nobler aims than theirs. He has food to eat, of which they know not—food which takes away his appetite for their beggarly husks and unsatisfying pleasures. The one fact of re-generation makes a tremendous difference; it opens between the Christian and the man of this world, a gulf wide as that which lay between Lazarus and Dives, across which even Lazarus could not pass. The Christian profession implies, not only the existence, but the practical recognition of this gulf.

4. The abandonment, not only of positive evil, but of all that is or shall appear to be, inconsistent with the prosecution of a Christian life, is implied in a profession of piety. If a person has been intemperate or profane, dishonest, untruthful or censorious, ill-tempered or ungenerous, his profession implies the abandonment of these evils, and his determination to conquer them. He may once, and again, and again, be overtaken by these faults; but his honest purpose and life-long endeavour is to abandon them. His profession implies

this, and more than this. When Saul of Tarsus was converted, he gave up all his chosen plans of life to follow Jesus. In Ephesus, there were converted, men who practised curious arts as a means of living; but they promptly burned their books and sacrificed their capital along with their business. A profession of piety implies that a man has made Christ's will and his own sanctification his ruling object in life. Whatever interferes with this is to be sacrificed. There may be nothing positively wrong in it, nor any precept directed against it; but if it has a deadening influence upon his piety, if it in any way hinders his progress in righteousness, then it is implied that he will abandon it. The person who is not prepared to do this, is not prepared for membership either in the church on earth or the church in heaven.

5. A Christian profession, further implies a settled purpose to do our whole duty so far as God shall make it known to us. Religion is doing the will of God, as revealed to us by His Word and Spirit; he who professes it, simply declares his intention to obey that will, and not his own. This purpose extends to all the relations and duties of life—to the intention to be a Christian and act like a Christian in every position, place and circumstance. It declares that in all things, great and small, it is our solemn design and settled purpose to act as Jesus would have done in our place. A Christian life implies a thorough consecration to a holy service. To follow the plough, to serve at the counter, to watch our children, to sweep the streets, is a holy employment, done to honor Him who imposes it. Our profession implies that, with a holy purpose in everything, we shall strive to obey God's will, turning every duty into a prayer, every blessing into a note of praise, and every hardship a step by which to climb nearer to God. It implies that we shall strive to make our whole life an act of service, and an act of worship, as well as a path to heaven, and a ladder by which to climb to God.

6. A Christian profession, also, implies that those, who make it, intend to be the warm and decided friends of every plan and effort for God's glory and man's well-being. It implies that they will positively befriend, and, up to their ability, actively assist in every enterprise which seeks to make men happier here, or prepare them for blessedness in heaven. They will, not only give for these objects, but they will give more largely than men who are not Christians. They will, not only NOT join with the foes of the church in opposing plans of usefulness, in exaggerating the faults and imperfections of Christian laborers, in throwing obstacles in their way, frustrating their plans, weakening their influence, and burdening their hearts; but they will strive to remedy defects, to excuse faults, to remove obstacles and discouragement and to extend their usefulness. Every Christian minister, missionary, Sunday School teacher, has a positive right to calculate on the warm sympathy, the kindly forbearance, the decided and active support of all who profess to love the Saviour. If *they* withhold this, where is he to look for sympathy, support and co-operation? Jesus loved all men; he went about doing good; he instituted the church and commissioned its officers to seek the present and future well-being of men; yea, more than this, he sacrificed himself for this object. A Christian profession implies, that he who makes it, sympathizes with Jesus in his mission for the lost, and is as ready to sacrifice his time and property, his opinions and feelings for this object, as Christ was to sacrifice himself. We are assured on the best of authority that there is no genuine love to God where there is not love to man. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that those, who profess Christianity, will be earnest workers and steady supporters of every wise religious and benevolent enterprise. If their profession means anything it certainly means this.

7th. Finally, Christians have very much in common—much more than they ever can have with any of those who are of the world. They trust in the one

God and love the same Saviour. They have similar temptations, trials and difficulties, as well as duties, consolations and hopes. They are all members of one family, travelling to the same eternal home, confiding in the same mercy, and dependent upon the same grace. They are all one in Christ Jesus. And hence, a profession of piety implies kindness, forbearance, charity, sympathy and all kindly dispositions towards their fellow-professors. In ancient times, it was said, "See, how these Christians love one another." It must not be forgotten that the same thing is still required, and implied in the very profession of Christianity. In making this profession, we enter that community, the law of which is, that no one is to seek his own, but every man the others' welfare. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

If these views on this important subject be correct, as they undoubtedly are, then a profession of piety is very much more than a decent form and a becoming ceremony. It implies conscious imperfection and sinfulness on the part of those who make it, along with the ardent desire and decided effort to attain perfection through the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Perfection is the Christian's goal and the Christian's ambition. There are failures, discouragements and fears, with numerous errors and backslidings. But, to him who comprehends what his profession means, and who holds it fast, firm unto the end, victory is certain—guaranteed by the Word of Him who cannot lie. "Fear not little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is an abundant call for earnestness, watchfulness and prayer; but there is no room for despondency. "He is faithful who hath promised," and, "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

It is the duty and the privilege of every person to make a profession of religion. From this there is no

escape. Nothing can be more obvious than that every man should not only be, but profess to be, the friend of the God that made him, and of the Saviour that died to redeem him. The neglect or refusal to make this profession absolves from no duty, while it debars from unspeakable privileges. The non-professors present are under just the same obligations to love the Lord and live to His praise, as are the members of these two churches. The non-recognition, or practical denial of these obligations only aggravates your guilt, as it is an open insult to the Lord that bought you. Yet this profession is not to be thoughtlessly or rashly made. We invite and urge you, in the name of the Lord, to come with us; but only on these terms. We would have none profess piety except those who honestly believe that they have been born again, and whose settled purpose it is to make God's will the rule, and Christ's glory the end of their lives. We wish no others to be members of the Christian Church.

Believe me, beloved friends, there is no other object worth living for, none so noble, none so blessed. To attain a fortune, or transact an extensive business, may for some men be a high aspiration; for others, the reputation of talent, knowledge or benevolence; for others an entrance to some social circle, or civic office; for others a respectable moral character: but he who, conscious of his immortality, aspires to a Christian life and a Christlike character, aspires to something nobler and lovelier, than ever entered into the ambition of an Alexander or a Creosus. In view of the coming judgment and the near eternity, it is folly to live for aught else. My friends, everything summons you to this. From every page of nature as of Scripture; from every day-break blushing with its beauty, and every night-fall which shows the stars marching in their brightness; from a past all restless with painful search; from a future whose experience we now and here, each hour determine; from the soul that never is born as it should

be, till born into true relation to God; from Sabbaths and from death-beds; from the cross and the ascension; from heaven that rings with the anthems of an unending jubilee; from hell that heaves, as Christ portrays it, and ceaselessly tosses in the gloom of God's frown;—from each alike, from all combined, comes the solemn admonition; "ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are God's." "Take up thy cross and follow me." "If any man love father or mother, wife or child, more than me, he is not worthy of me."

May God, by his grace, bless to each the urgent lesson, and make it to all of us a message from the skies; and unto *Him* be all the praise! Amen.

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